

# **HABITAT MONTANA**

## **REPORT TO THE 65<sup>th</sup> MONTANA LEGISLATURE**

### **MONTANA FISH, WILDLIFE AND PARKS**



Sun River Wildlife Management Area. (Photo Credit: B. Lonner.)

**Wildlife Division  
JANUARY 2017**

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## OVERVIEW

This report summarizes Habitat Conservation projects completed by Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) from January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2016 using HB 526 (also referred to as “Habitat Montana”) and other funding sources. Habitat Montana was originally established through legislation passed by the 1987 Montana Legislature (87-1-241 et seq. MCA). Administrative rules (ARM 12.9.511) further direct FWP to apply Habitat Montana guidelines to all of FWP’s wildlife habitat acquisition programs, where appropriate.

Habitat Montana came into existence from a need felt by the people of Montana. Montanans cherish their wildlife and outdoor opportunities. In order to keep wildlife abundant into the future, the necessities of life for wild animals need to be maintained. In other words, conservation of habitat is an important goal for Montanans to preserve their way of life.



**Figure 1. Fresno Wildlife Management Area (Photo Credit: K. Johnson)**

Montana hunters, outdoor recreationists, and conservation organizations have long considered the Habitat Montana Program essential to their interests, and without their support this program would not exist today. Conservation organizations have often partnered with FWP to protect tracts of important habitat for their mutual conservation benefit. Partners include: The Nature Conservancy; Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation; Pheasants Forever; The National Wild Turkey Federation; Mule Deer Foundation; Trout Unlimited; Safari Club International; Trust for Public Lands; The Conservation Fund; The Confederated Salish-Kootenai Tribes; United States Forest Service; United States Bureau of Land Management; United States Fish and Wildlife Service; Bonneville Power Administration; The Montana Fish and Wildlife Conservation Trust; The Blackfoot Challenge; Montana Wildlife Federation; Northwestern Energy; PPL-Montana; Butte Skyline Sportsman Association; Anaconda Sportsmen Club; Montana Audubon; Five Valleys Land Trust; Rock Creek Land Trust; Flathead Land Trust; and a variety of other organizations.

Habitat Montana helps the people of the State conserve wildlife habitat. It does so in a balanced fashion while often maintaining the traditional agricultural uses of the land. For



almost 30 years, the program has demonstrated how wildlife and agriculture can coexist and benefit each other. The program has a committed constituency that appreciates land conservation actions that endure for generations.



**Figure 2. Reviewing details of the Haskill Basin Conservation Easement. (Photo Credit: R. Northrup)**

Landowners have sold conservation easements to FWP for a variety of reasons including to ensure future conservation of natural and agricultural values on the ranch; to allow their heirs to be able to afford to buy the ranch; for family estate planning; to ensure a place for the public to recreate, especially for hunting; to enlarge agricultural operations; and to pay off debt.

Between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2016, FWP secured a total of 16,740 acres through a combination of fee title acquisition and conservation easement (Tables 1 and 2). This includes 10 fee title projects totaling 11,665.88 acres and 3 conservation easement projects totaling 5,074 acres. These projects were completed using a variety of funding sources totaling \$31,968,471 including \$3,649,160 of HB526 (Habitat Montana) funds.

As of December 2016, FWP holds 43<sup>1</sup> Habitat Montana wildlife conservation easements covering 240,452 acres and costing approximately \$28.2 million in Habitat Montana funds. Fee title ownership purchased through the program totals 135,520 acres, costing \$46.0 million in Habitat Montana funds. Habitat Montana projects by area are 54% easements, 31% fee title, and 15% lease.

Total FWP wildlife lands, involving all funding sources, have a different breakdown. In total, the Wildlife Division is responsible for 385,311 acres in fee title, 72,206 acres of leases/rights of way, and 441,473 acres in conservation easement (private lands).

<sup>1</sup>The 2015 Habitat Montana Report reported 49 conservation easements, which was actually the number of easement transactions to date. Some easements have been added to over time, and the additions were inadvertently counted as separate conservation easements in the 2015 report. The figure reported here is the actual number of conservation easements, some of which have involved multiple transactions as lands have been added to individual conservation easements over time.

## HISTORY OF HABITAT MONTANA

The Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks has been involved with conserving habitat for wildlife benefit since 1940. For many years there was no specific funding source to address the fundamental need to acquire, conserve, and manage important wildlife habitats. When dollars were available, land was purchased and became part of the Department's wildlife management areas.

The "Habitat Montana Program" is the result of legislation passed in 1987 (HB 526) in which portions of several big game licenses were earmarked for the protection of wildlife habitat, particularly 'important habitat that is seriously threatened' (HB526 Statement of Intent). The rules ensure that acquired interests in habitat lands are reasonably distributed around the state in accordance with the statewide habitat acquisition plan.



**Figure 3. Wetland basin on the Bull River WMA. (Photo Credit: B. Sterling)**

In the 1980s, conservationists discussed the possibility of setting aside specific funding for the Department for the purpose of purchasing important habitat on a consistent basis when key habitats became available. The 1987 Montana Legislature saw the introduction of HB 526, which would be funded by fees from hunting licenses. The debate in the legislature was between those who did not want the Department buying

land and those who saw habitat as the foundation for the future. The compromise by the legislature was authority given to the Department to acquire interests in land, with the legislature directing the agency to attempt conservation easements or lease before fee title purchase. Fee title purchase was still allowed because the legislature understood the seller of land would determine which method was in his best interest.

HB 526 became reality and is currently generating about \$5.3 million per year for acquiring interests in "important habitat that is seriously threatened". Approximately 92% of revenue for this program comes from nonresident hunting licenses.

From the very beginning, FWP tried to implement the intent of the legislation, but its success was limited. The reason was twofold: first, the Department was unfamiliar with conservation easements and needed to develop its expertise on implementing this

conservation tool; and second, landowners were skeptical of easements. These two problems no longer exist.

The first year that funding was available, the Department purchased two properties in fee title, the Robb Ledford Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and an addition to the Blackfoot-Clearwater WMA.

In 1989, the second year of operation, two additional WMA's were purchased. A major effort to acquire a conservation easement on the Brewer Ranch changed to a fee title purchase at the request of the landowner. The Department assured the FWP Commission that easement terms would be placed on the Brewer property and then sold. This happened five years later.

In 1990, FWP purchased its first wildlife conservation easement (160 acres adjacent to Dome Mountain Wildlife Management Area). In 1992, FWP made an agreement with a landowner to enter into a five-year management agreement which both parties hoped would lead to a conservation easement, which did happen in 1998.

A major threshold was crossed in 1994 with the success of exchanging the Brewer property, with easement terms in place, for an easement on the Page/Whitham property north of Fort Peck Reservoir. Interest by the agricultural community accelerated with the involved landowner answering many questions from interested landowners. Since then, FWP has had a variety of project proposals to select from.



**Figure 4. Thompson Fisher Conservation Easement (Photo Credit: R. Northrup)**

The 1991 Legislature directed FWP to review its habitat program. The Department hired two consultants, Econ, Inc. to look at FWP administrative functioning for the program, and Canyon Consulting, Inc., to evaluate public participation in the program.

In September 1992, Canyon Consulting recommended implementing a policy that defined the public benefits to be derived from the habitat program. The Commission adopted policies through the administrative rule making (ARM) process, directing FWP to provide the following public benefits (ARM 12.9.510):

- Conserve and enhance land, water, and wildlife
- Contribute to hunting and fishing opportunities
- Provide incentives for habitat conservation on private land
- Contribute to non-hunting recreation
- Protect open space and scenic areas
- Promote habitat-friendly agriculture
- Maintain the local tax base, through payments in lieu of taxes for real estate, while demonstrating that productive wildlife habitat is compatible with agriculture and other land uses.

One of Econ's main recommendations, to develop a comprehensive statewide plan, was completed in 1994, the 'Statewide Habitat Plan, an implementation of FWP Commission Habitat Montana Policy'.

In 1993, the Wildlife Division Administrator asked for a habitat mapping effort from the Regional Wildlife Managers to discern which habitats were the most at risk. The habitats defined in the Statewide Plan are 1) Montane Forest, 2) Intermountain Grassland, 3) Riparian/Wetland, 4) Shrub-Grassland, 5) Prairie Forest, and 6) Prairie Grassland. In a display of unanimity, every region identified Intermountain Grassland, Riparian/Wetland, and Shrub-Grassland as the habitats most in need of attention. Intermountain Grasslands are choice areas for residential development. Such subdivisions can disrupt winter range for wildlife as well as affect wildlife movements and migration routes. Riparian habitat comprises less than 4% of the state but is a highly productive habitat type. Many species of wildlife depend on riparian habitats in some stage of their life cycle. Riparian habitats are also heavily managed by landowners because of its productive ground. Sagebrush-grassland has diminished across the West, including in Montana. This is a habitat of special concern. Montana is a leader in sagebrush conservation in a state where half of these habitats are in private ownership.

The Goal Statement in the Statewide Habitat Plan states: "Beginning in October 1993, for the next two years, the intermountain grassland, shrub-grassland, and riparian ecosystems will be the focus of wildlife habitat acquisitions, with the objective of conserving approximately 10% of each of these ecosystems." In October of 1995 this goal was still considered valid and was to continue until 2006. In the 2005 Legislature the sunset provision for HB526 was removed, making the program permanent. The habitat goals have remained the same and are consistent with the current State Wildlife Action Plan for Montana published in 2015.





**Figure 5. Ray Kuhns WMA. (Photo Credit: T. Thier)**

In 1998, the FWP Commission asked for an internal audit of the conservation easements. This was divided into two sections, a review of the legal aspects of the easements, and a review of the rigor of the baseline inventory reports. Fifteen easements were chosen by the legal audit contractor, Knight, Masar and Harris, Attorneys at Law. The contractor working on baselines did likewise. The audit, delivered in 1999, showed no major problems with the easements and associated baselines. In 2000, the other 15 easements were reviewed, again with no major problems. The primary author of the report, Robert Knight, came before the Commission to answer questions. He said the language and form of the easements were up to date and there were no specific problems. There is constant discussion between the Wildlife Division, Legal Unit, and Lands Unit on the formulation of new easement language and terms to adapt to changing concerns and continued experience.

Over the program's history, FWP's work on wildlife land projects have varied. Early efforts using Habitat Montana funds focused on expanding existing wildlife management areas such as the Blackfoot-Clearwater (deer and elk winter range), Judith (elk winter range) and Ninepipe (wetlands/waterfowl and pheasant habitat) or acquiring new WMA's such as Robb/Ledford (elk winter range), Dome Mtn.(elk winter range), and Mt. Silcox (Bighorn Sheep winter range). Gradually, the focus was on conservation easements on important habitat types including big sagebrush-grassland (Brewer, South Ranch, Fluss, Cowell, Peters); riparian (Hirsch, Bice, Hart); and intermountain grassland (Maher, Bolin, Sieben Ranch, and Hirschy Ranch) as examples.

Since 1987, the state legislature has adopted statutes with specific requirements for land acquisition processes. FWP's wildlife land acquisitions include the following program and statutory process requirements (this list does not include negotiation, due diligence, and other real estate transaction steps): 1) internal request for habitat acquisition proposals; 2) proposal ranking and initial selection using standardized ranking criteria; 3) initial endorsement by the Fish and Wildlife Commission; 4) conduct public scoping (for projects of 640 acres or larger); 5) develop a Management Plan for the property; 6) work with the

county weed coordinator to assure weed management compliance on fee title projects; 7) develop a Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) environmental assessment that includes analyses of potential impacts to social/economic values, neighboring properties, tax revenue, government services, employment opportunities, local schools, and private businesses; 8) make these documents available to adjacent landowners as well as the general public; 9) notify the affected county commission with project details and analysis materials; 10) conduct a public hearing during the public review period; 11) publish a decision notice; 12) if the project remains viable, present the project to the Fish and Wildlife Commission for final consideration; and finally 13) present the project to the State Board of Land Commissioners for their consideration.

## MANAGING LAND PROJECTS

*Maintenance:* Twenty percent of the Habitat Montana revenue is used for operation and maintenance of all FWP wildlife lands. According to statute, 50% of these funds are deposited in a Habitat Trust Account. The remaining 50% and interest from the Habitat Trust Account are available for funding maintenance projects, totaling approximately

\$800,000 annually in recent years. The majority of these funds are used to meet the intent of the Good Neighbor Policy (MCA 23-1-126(2) ) including fence maintenance, road maintenance, and weed control on FWP fee ownership lands. FWP funding from non-earmarked hunting license revenue, Pittman Robertson funds, and state and federal grants are also used to pay for

operations and management costs of WMAs, totaling well over \$1 million that are in

addition to Habitat Montana funding. Each year the Wildlife Division completes an average of 15 large maintenance and construction projects at a cost of approximately \$550,000.



**Figure 6. Cattle grazing system on the Blackleaf Wildlife Management Area. (Photo Credit: R. Rauscher)**



The 2009 legislature passed a measure that allowed FWP to invest income from forest treatments back into forestry work on FWP lands. The Wildlife Division has since planned and implemented a number of forestry projects on Mount Haggin, West Kootenai, Marshall Creek, Threemile, and Blackfoot Clearwater WMAs. These and anticipated future projects serve to enhance wildlife habitat and address fuel and forest health issues. A separate forestry report by FWP is available for the 2017 Legislative Session.

*Taxes:* For wildlife lands, FWP pays to the county in which the land resides “a sum equal to the amount of taxes which would be payable on county assessment of the property were it taxable to a private citizen” (MCA 87-1-603). For tax year 2016, FWP paid \$437,598 in tax payments on its wildlife lands.

*Conservation Easements:* Approximately \$25,000 of Habitat Montana funding is used to help pay for annually monitoring each conservation easement to assure easement compliance and to work with landowners on any issues that may arise. The major terms in FWP conservation easements involve both *protection* and *management* of the Land.

- **Protection:** This refers to easement terms such as no subdivision and building limitations on the land. Normal farming practices continue, but no new fields are broken. No commercial activities are typically allowed other than those appropriate to agricultural practices. Mining or other mineral extractions are addressed in the easement with the goal of minimizing impacts to the conservation values.
- **Management:** This refers to day-to-day practices agreed to in a management plan that assure vegetation, soils, and other habitat features are conserved as a part of ongoing agricultural activities, and recreation is maintained at an appropriate level to serve the public good while avoiding negative impacts. Management often includes developing and implementing livestock grazing systems, access plans for the recreating public, and habitat restoration. Improvements necessary for implementing management plans are often paid for in part using Habitat Montana funds. Once improvements are in place, the ongoing need associated with managing conservation easements is monitoring, maintaining regular communication with landowners, updating management plans as needed, working with and informing new landowners of easement terms, and working on periodic compliance issues.

## 2015-2016 WILDLIFE LAND PROJECTS – HABITAT MONTANA AND OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

The following section summarizes all land acquisition projects, conservation easements and fee title, which were completed for wildlife conservation during calendar years 2015 and 2016. The funding sources vary among projects, of which some do not include Habitat Montana funding (Tables 1 and 2). A more detailed summary of each land project follows in the order listed in the tables.

The 2015 Legislature passed a spending bill (HB 403, Section 4) that appropriated spending authority for Habitat Montana to be used “for purposes of land leasing, easement purchase, or development agreements and may not be used to purchase land except in cases where the department is currently negotiating such purchase.” Consistent with this restriction on the Habitat Montana spending authorization, all land acquisitions listed in Table 2 that involved Habitat Montana funds were under negotiation and had been endorsed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission prior to the 2015 legislative session.

**Table 1. Conservation easements acquired through the Fish, Wildlife and Parks’ Wildlife Division during calendar years 2015 and 2016.**

Transaction Date	Site Name	Type *	Purchase Cost	Funding Source	Acres
June 15, 2015	Pheasant Bend CE	WCE	\$280,000	Habitat Montana - \$195,000 Northwestern Energy - \$40,000 Montana Outdoor Legacy Foundation - \$25,000 Safari Club International - \$10,000 Pheasants Forever, Inc. - \$5,000 Ducks Unlimited - \$5,000	294.00
Feb. 16, 2016	Haskill Basin CE	WCE	\$16,700,000	City of Whitefish - \$7,700,000 Forest Legacy - \$7,000,000 Habitat Conservation Program - \$2,000,000 Landowner Donation - \$3,280,000	3,020.00
June 30, 2016	Pintail Flat CE	WCE		Migratory Game Bird License Habitat Program - \$305,000 Habitat Montana - \$66,785 Ducks Unlimited - \$100,000 DEQ wetland funds - \$33,215.23	1,760.00
<b>total new conservation easement land acres</b>					<b>5,074.00</b>

\*WCE = Wildlife Conservation Easement

**Table 2. Fee title land acquisitions completed through the Fish, Wildlife and Parks' Wildlife Division during calendar years 2015 and 2016.**

Transaction Date	Site Name	Type	Purchase Cost	Funding Source	Acres
January 22, 2015	Fish Creek addition	WMA	\$349,971	Pittman-Robertson - \$229,971.36 Northwestern Energy - \$120,000	148.25
February 12, 2015	Marias River exchange	WMA	--	Land Exchange	76.73
January 15, 2016	Wall Creek addition	WMA	\$1,041,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$790,125 Habitat Montana - \$250,875	631.12
February 5, 2016	North Shore Flathead Lake addition	WMA	\$489,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$489,000 Landowner Donation - \$163,000	76.70
March 15, 2016	Nevada Lake addition	WMA	\$562,500	Forest Legacy - \$562,500 Landowner Donation - \$187,500	760.03
May 4, 2016	Fish Creek addition	WMA	\$1,400,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$1,050,000 Habitat Montana - \$350,000	320.00
June 20, 2016	Threemile addition	WMA	\$0	Landowner Donation - \$225,000	214.80
August 22, 2016	Beartooth DNRC inholdings	WMA	\$4,039,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$3,029,250 Habitat Montana - \$1,009,750	5,438.43
August 22, 2016	Blackleaf DNRC inholdings	WMA	\$855,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$641,250 Habitat Montana - \$213,750	639.48
August 22, 2016	Sun River DNRC inholdings	WMA	\$6,252,000	Pittman-Robertson - \$4,689,000 Habitat Montana - \$1,563,000	3,410.35
November 7, 2016	Canyon Creek addition	WMA	\$0	Donation by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation	729.00
<b>Disposal (2015-2016)</b>					
Feb. 12, 2015	Marias River	WMA	--	Land Exchange	-50.01
<b>total new fee-title land acres</b>					<b>11,665.88</b>

## **Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement**

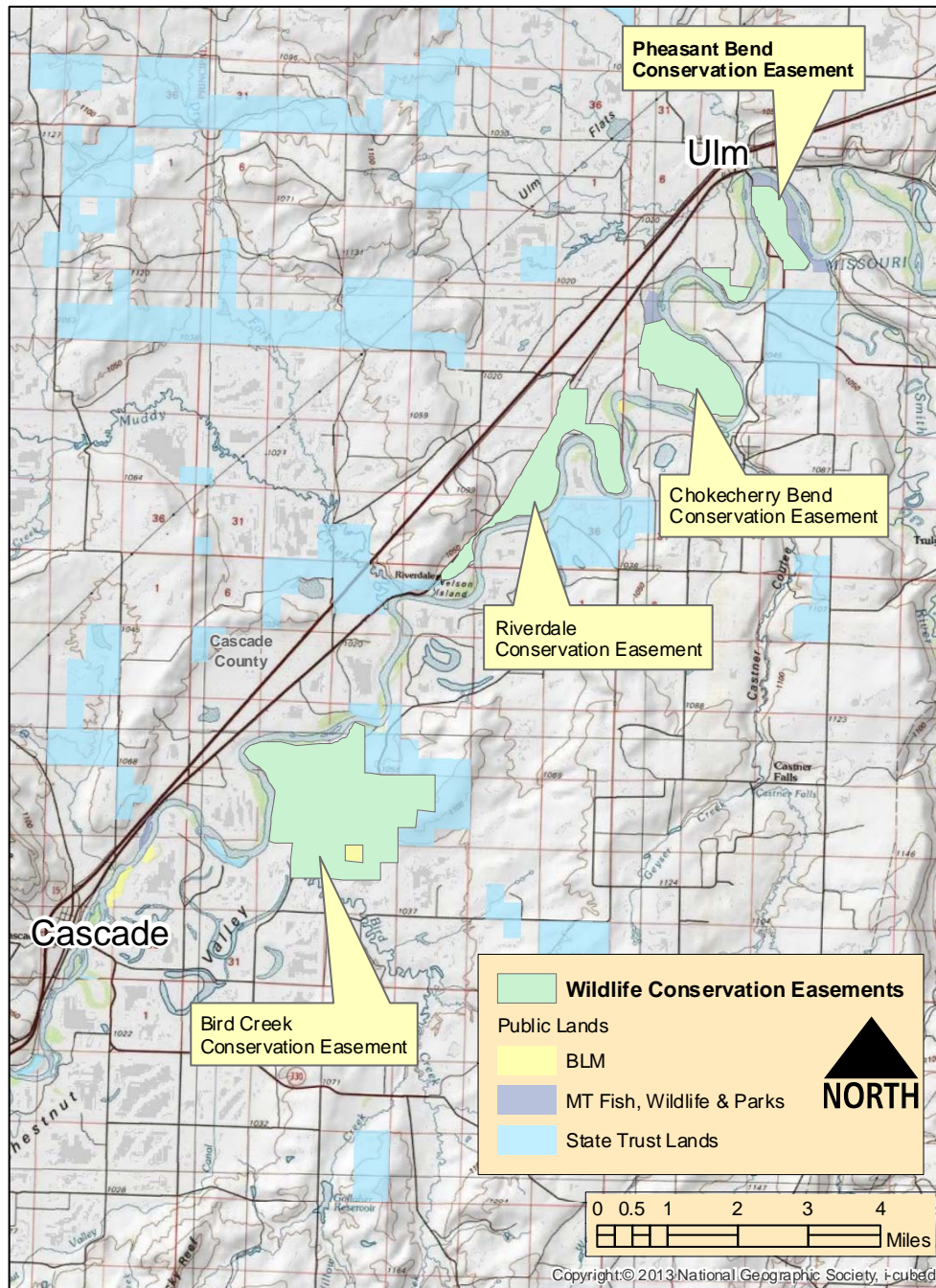
**Purpose:** This 294-acre conservation easement along the Missouri River near Ulm will conserve riparian and wetland habitats adjacent to croplands, keeping the land in agricultural production. The property supports white-tailed deer, ring-necked pheasants, wild turkeys, and a host of other wildlife associated with riparian and wetland habitats. This conservation easement is one of a number of bottomland easement projects in the vicinity that FWP administers.

**Habitat:** Riparian, Wetland, Cropland



**Figure 7. Wildlife habitat association with the Pheasant Bent Conservation Easement, immediately southeast of Ulm along the Missouri River in Cascade County. (Photo Credit: C. Loecker.)**





**Figure 8. Pheasant Bend Conservation Easement (near top of map) and other FWP conservation easements in the vicinity.**

## Haskill Basin Conservation Easement

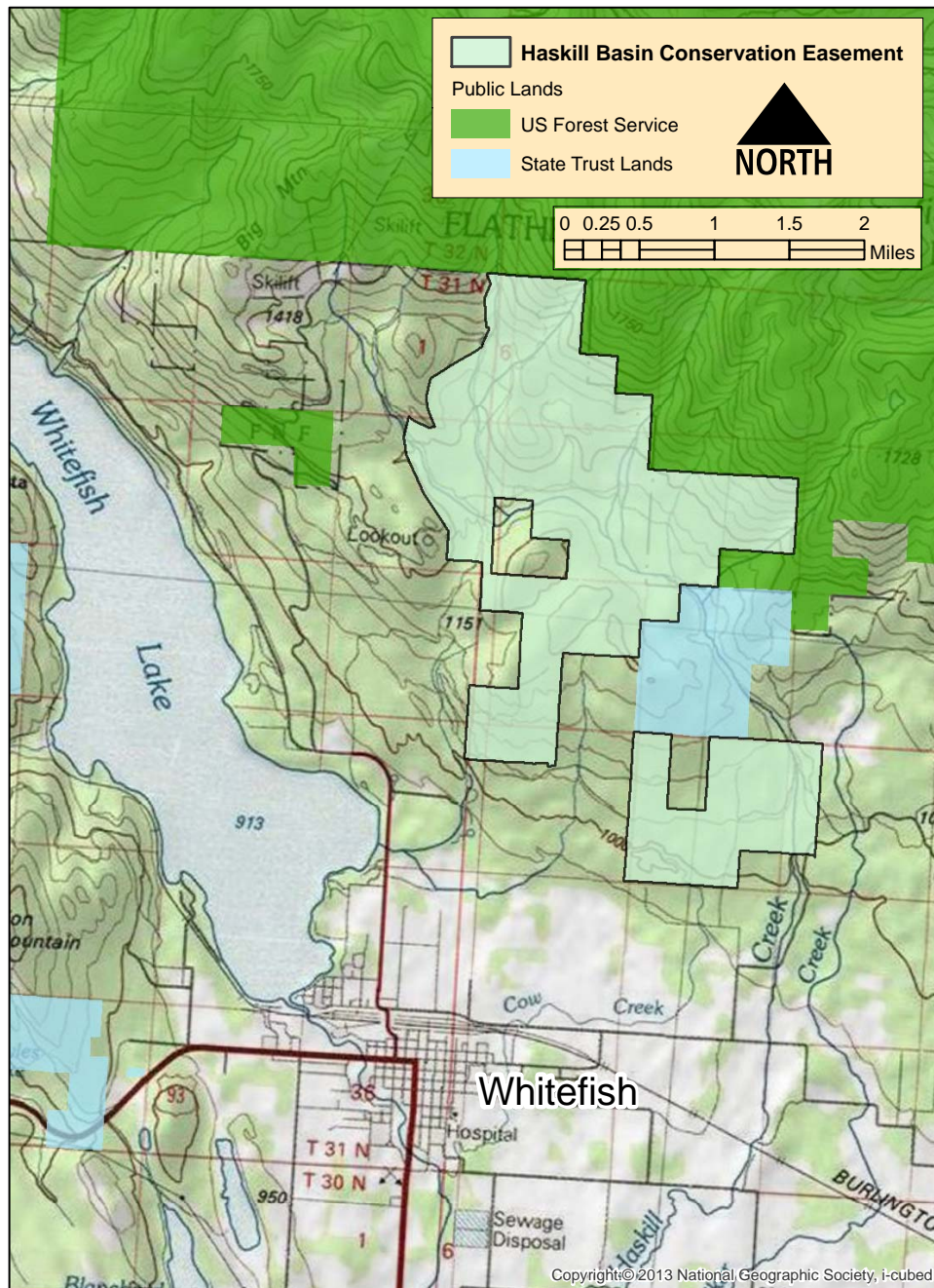
**Purpose:** The Haskill Basin, adjacent to Whitefish, is owned and managed by Stoltze Land and Lumber Company primarily for timber production. This 3,020-acre conservation easement project protects many public values including high priority wildlife habitat, watershed supplying 75% of the municipal water for the city of Whitefish, a long history of substantial public use for hunting and other recreation, and a sustainable source of forest products supporting the local economy. Both Iron Horse Subdivision, adjacent to the west side of this project, and the neighboring Whitefish Mountain Resort created an intense amount of high-end development pressure for the Stoltze property. Development would have directly impacted these public values. The conservation easement will substantially reduce the likelihood for wildlife-suburban conflicts that would have resulted had the land been developed. The habitat includes winter range for mule deer, white-tailed deer and moose, priority habitat for grizzly bears, and Haskill creek which supports a population of genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout.

**Habitat:** Coniferous Forest, Riparian, Stream



**Figure 9. Overview of Haskill Basin Conservation Easement above the city of Whitefish, Flathead County. (Photo Credit: Google Earth.)**





**Figure 10. Haskill Basin Conservation Easement, totaling 3,020 acres.**

## **Pintail Flat Conservation Easement**

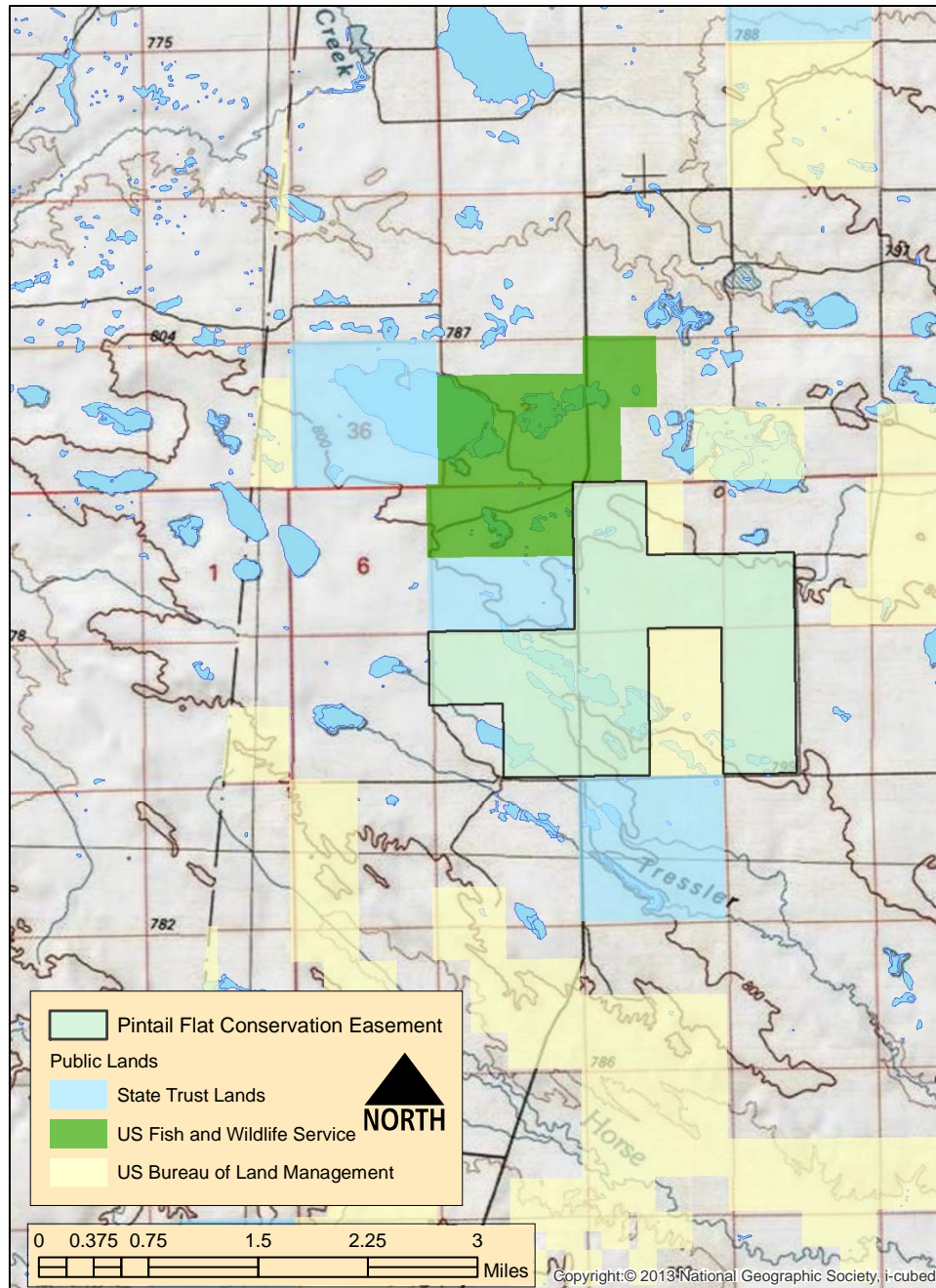
**Purpose:** The primary purpose of the Pintail Flat Conservation Easement is to enhance and conserve a productive complex of grassland and wetland habitats as well as traditional agricultural uses, to include livestock grazing. This interspersed of grasslands and wetlands is valuable for waterfowl production and breeding and migrating shorebirds and grassland birds. In addition, these habitats support sage-grouse, sharp-tailed grouse, mule deer, antelope, black-tailed prairie dogs, and a wide variety of other native species. This property is strategically located adjacent to BLM, DNRC, and USFWS Waterfowl Production Area lands (Figure 12) that support similar habitats, providing a sizeable block of conservation and public access. This conservation easement also assures free public access for hunting and wildlife viewing in perpetuity.

**Habitat:** Wetlands, Mixed Grass Grassland



**Figure 11. Aerial of a portion of the Pintail Flat CE wetland complex, located 11 miles south of Dodson in Phillips County. (Photo Credit: R. Sanders)**





**Figure 12. Pintail Flat Conservation Easement, totaling 1,760 acres.**

## **Fish Creek Wildlife Management Area Additions**

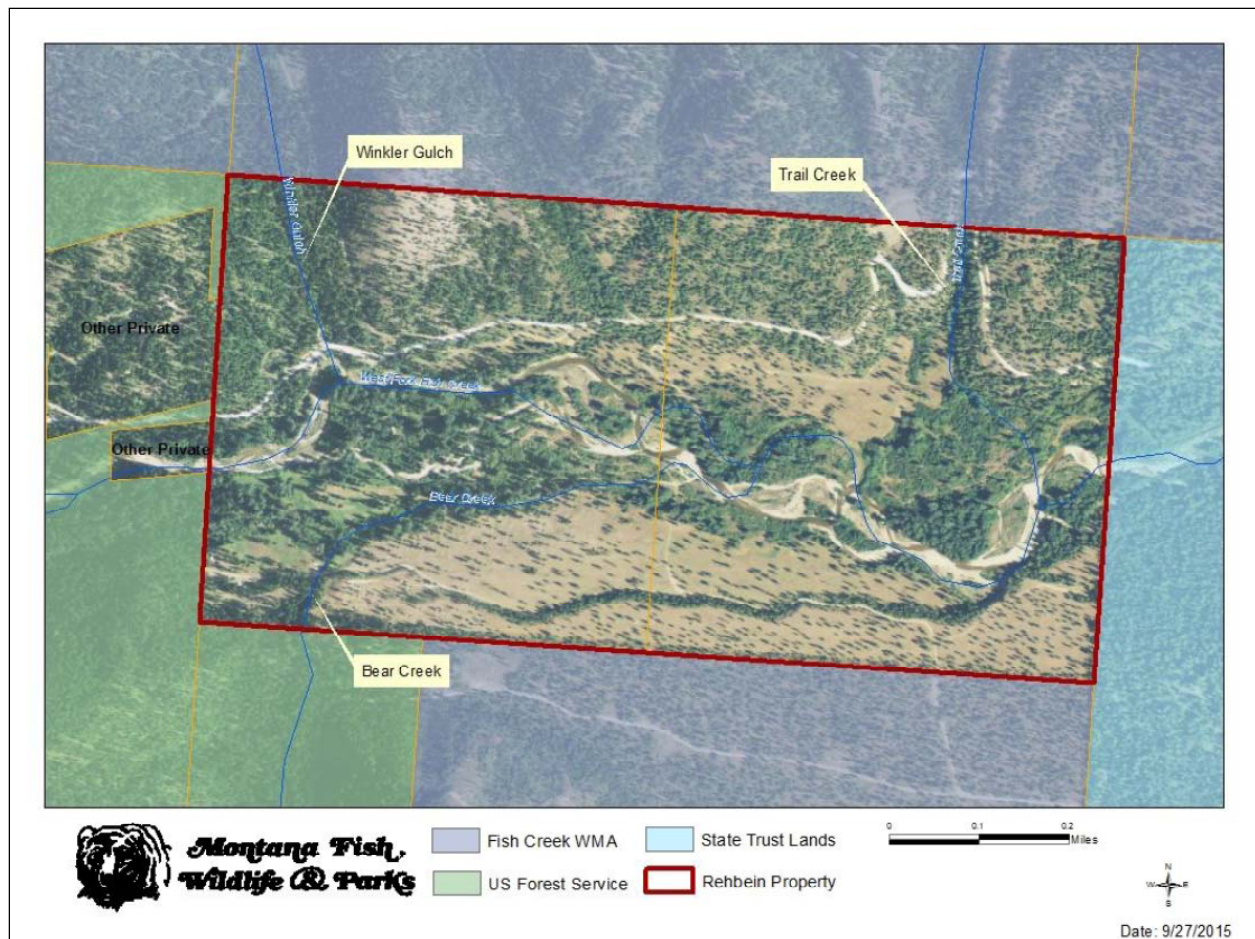
**Purpose:** The Fish Creek WMA provides crucial winter range for elk, both species of deer, and moose and serves as an important linkage zone for forest carnivores connecting the Ninemile Divide with the Bitterroot Mountains and Wilderness. Streams flowing through the WMA provide high priority spawning habitat for westslope cutthroat and the federally listed bull trout. Two new inholding additions (referred herein as east and west) are a part of this complex of streams, riparian habitat, and ungulate winter range. In addition to directly conserving these habitats, the acquisitions curb the potential for habitat conversion or residential development and subsequent conflicts within the interior of the wildlife management area.

**Habitat:** Riparian, Stream, Coniferous Forest, Bunchgrass Grassland, Shrubland

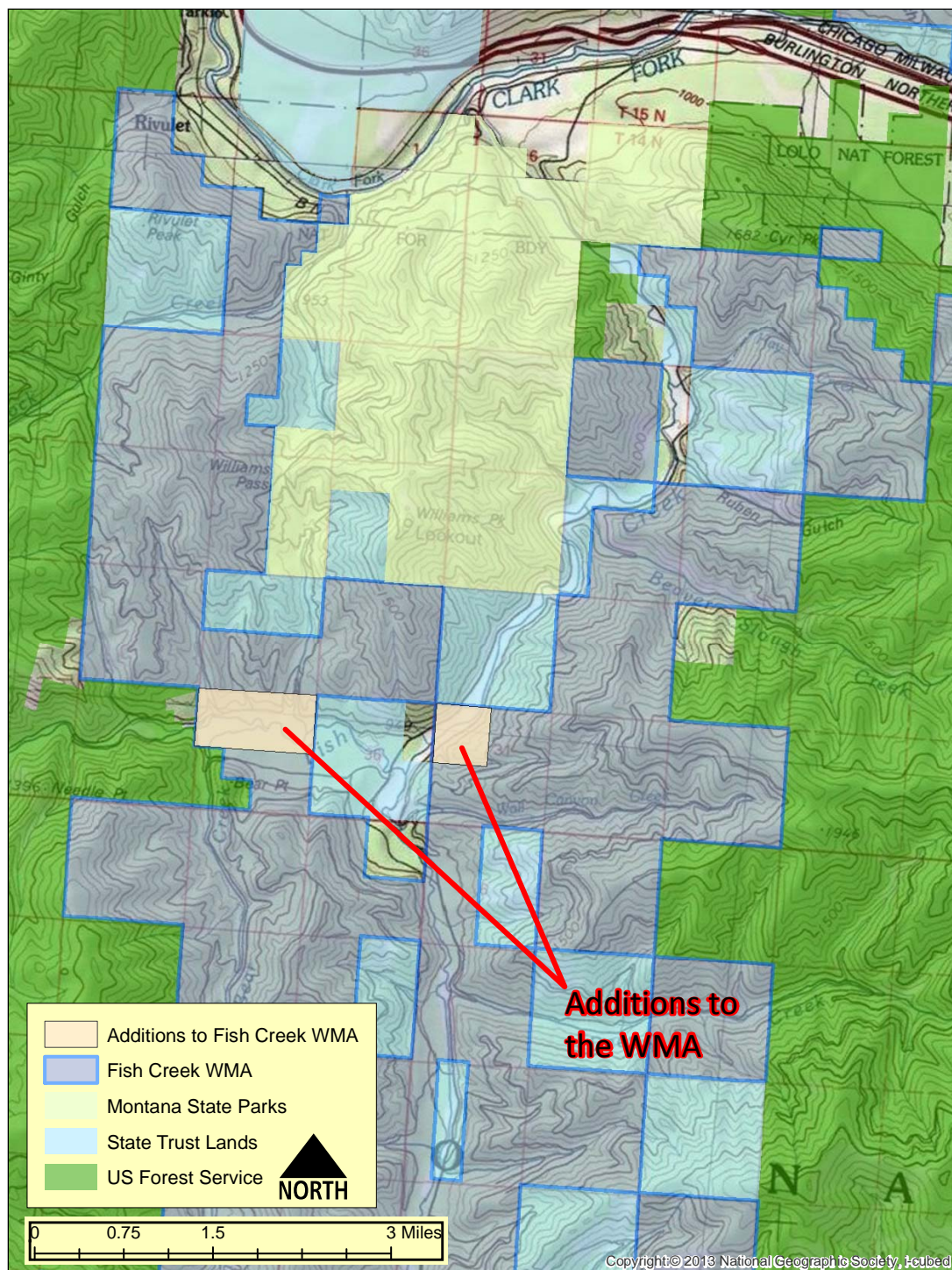


**Figure 13. Elk on the upland habitat associated with the east inholding purchase, totaling 148 acres. (Photo Credit: L. Bradley)**





**Figure 14. Overview of stream, riparian, and upland habitats associated with the west inholding purchase, totaling 320 acres. (Photo Credit: 2013 National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP))**



**Figure 15. Two inholdings acquired within the Fish Creek WMA, located approximately 6 miles south of Tarkio, Mineral County.**



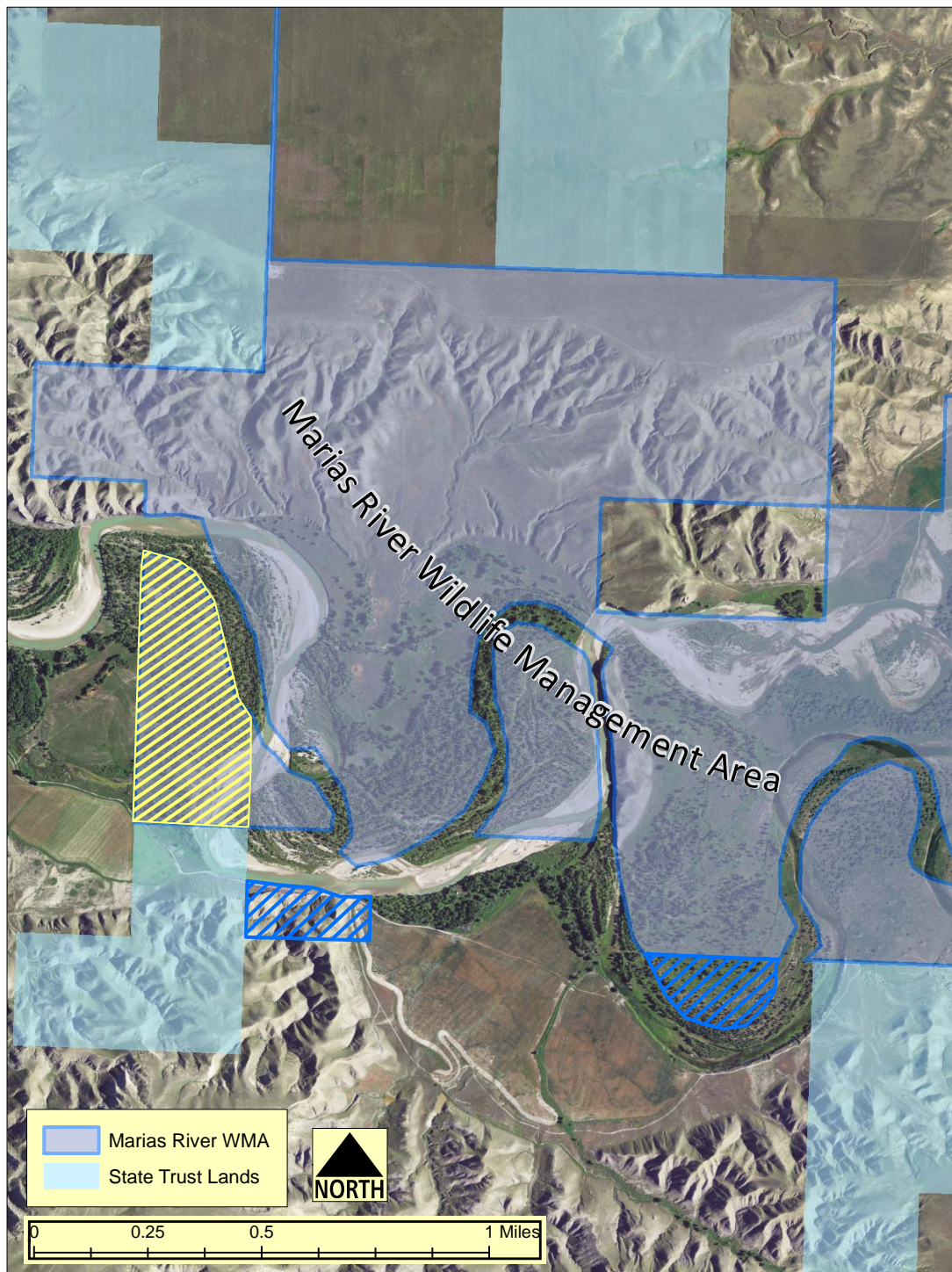
## Marias River Wildlife Management Area Land Exchange

**Purpose:** The Marias River WMA, located 16 miles southeast of Cutbank, conserves 14 miles of river bottom and associated upland habitats. The area provides high value habitat for white-tailed deer, upland game birds, and other wildlife associated with the river, riparian habitats, and grasslands. The property also provides access for recreation including hunting, fishing, hiking, and floating. This land exchange was completed to consolidate ownerships, provide more effective management, increase WMA riparian habitat acres, and improve public accessibility to WMA lands.

**Habitat:** Riparian, Wetlands, River



**Figure 16. Land acquired on Marias WMA through an exchange with the adjacent neighbor (riparian habitat identified by the yellow arrow), Pondera County. (Photo Credit: R. Northrup)**



**Figure 17. Land exchange completed at the west end of the Marias Wildlife Management Area. Blue hatch polygons were lands transferred to the neighboring landowner, totaling 50 acres. Yellow hatch polygon is land transferred to FWP (77 acres), to be managed as part of the WMA. (Photo Credit: 2013 National Agriculture Imagery Program (NAIP))**



## Wall Creek Wildlife Management Area Addition

**Purpose:** Wall Creek WMA, located about 19 miles south of Ennis, provides critical winter range for elk along the east slopes of the Gravelly Mountains. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) purchased this 631-acre parcel adjacent to the WMA with the intent of eventually selling the land to FWP at appraised value, for incorporating into the WMA. Upon RMEF ownership, the organization moved a house off of the parcel. Conserving habitat that is contiguous with the WMA where wintering elk are tolerated is important to maintaining a herd of 2,000 animals. The property also provides fawning habitat for pronghorn and supports a variety of other native wildlife, including breeding grassland birds. Similar to the rest of the WMA, the parcel provides hunting opportunity for elk, deer, and gray partridge.

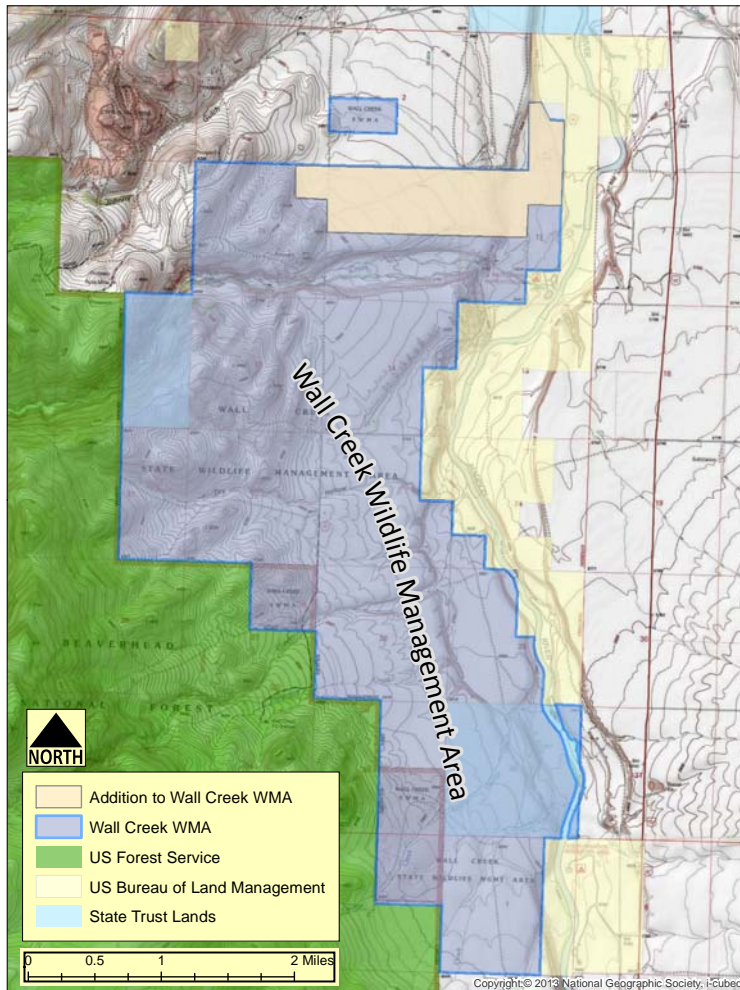
**Habitats:** Bunchgrass Grassland, Shrubland



**Figure 18.** Part of the 631-acre addition to Wall Creek WMA looking into the Madison River valley, Madison County. (Photo Credit: RMEF)



**Figure 19. Hundreds of wintering elk congregated on the new addition to Wall Creek WMA. Image taken March 2015, prior to acquisition. (Photo Credit: D. Waltee)**



**Figure 20. Overview of the addition on the north end of Wall Creek WMA.**



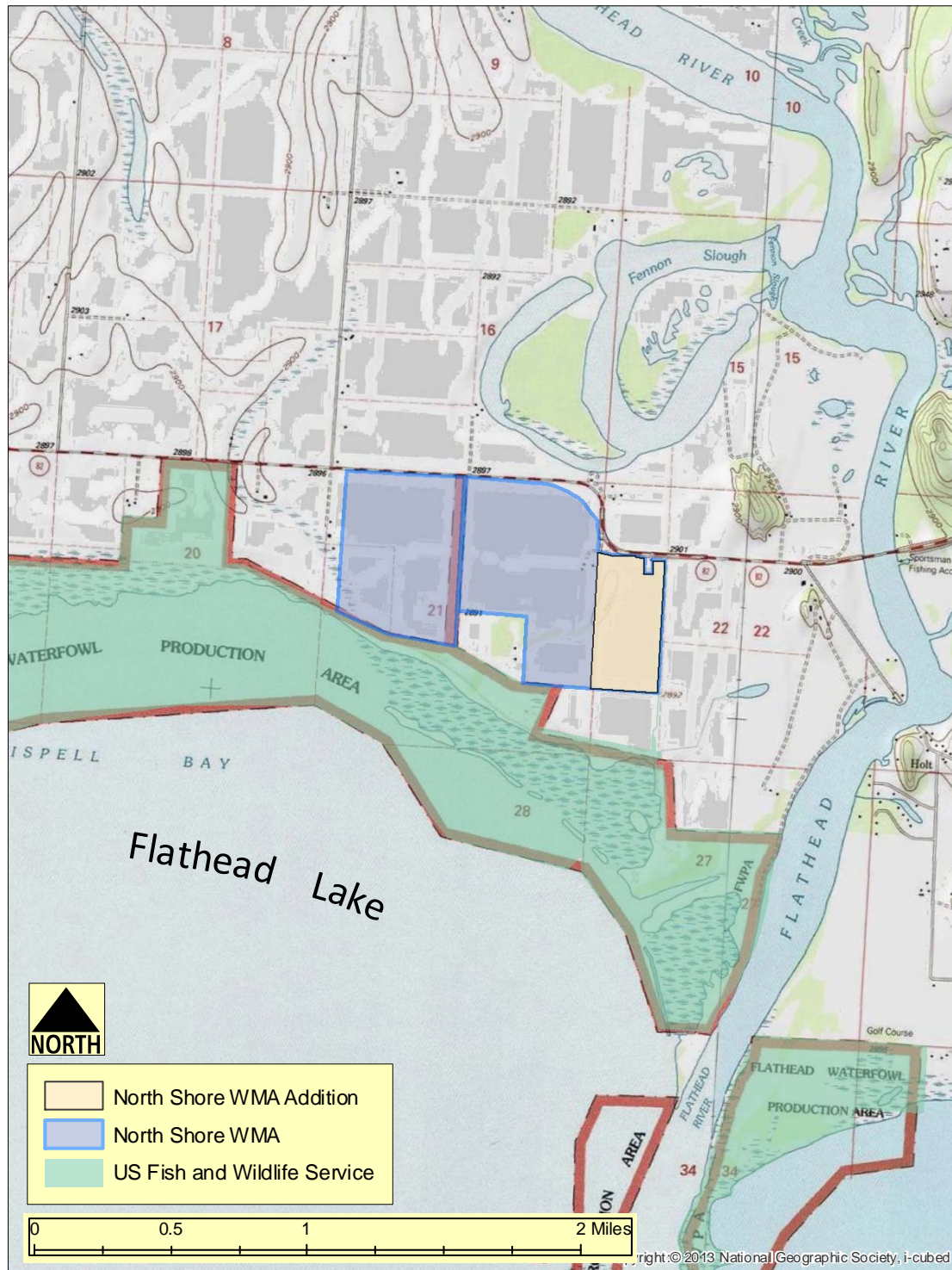
## North Shore Wildlife Management Area Addition

**Purpose:** The North Shore WMA was originally purchased to increase habitat protection along the North Shore of Flathead Lake, enhance habitat for wildlife, and provide new public recreational opportunities. The WMA is situated adjacent to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Waterfowl Production Area. The WMA serves multiple purposes including protection of water quality associated with the north end of Flathead Lake, directly benefiting bull trout and other fisheries, and maintaining cropland agriculture to annually attract and support thousands of migrating waterfowl that congregate in the shallow waters along the lake's edge and feed in the agricultural fields. The WMA also includes shallow wetland habitats and idle cover for pheasants, white-tailed deer, and other wildlife. The addition involves 71 acres of primarily cropland habitat. All of the cropped areas are managed through a cropping lease agreement with a local producer.

**Habitats:** Wetland, Cropland, Shrub and Grass Plantings



**Figure 21. Thousands of spring migrating waterfowl refueling on North Shore WMA grain fields, Flathead County. (Photo Credit: J. Vore)**



**Figure 22. Addition to the North Shore WMA, approximately 4 miles east of Somers, MT.**



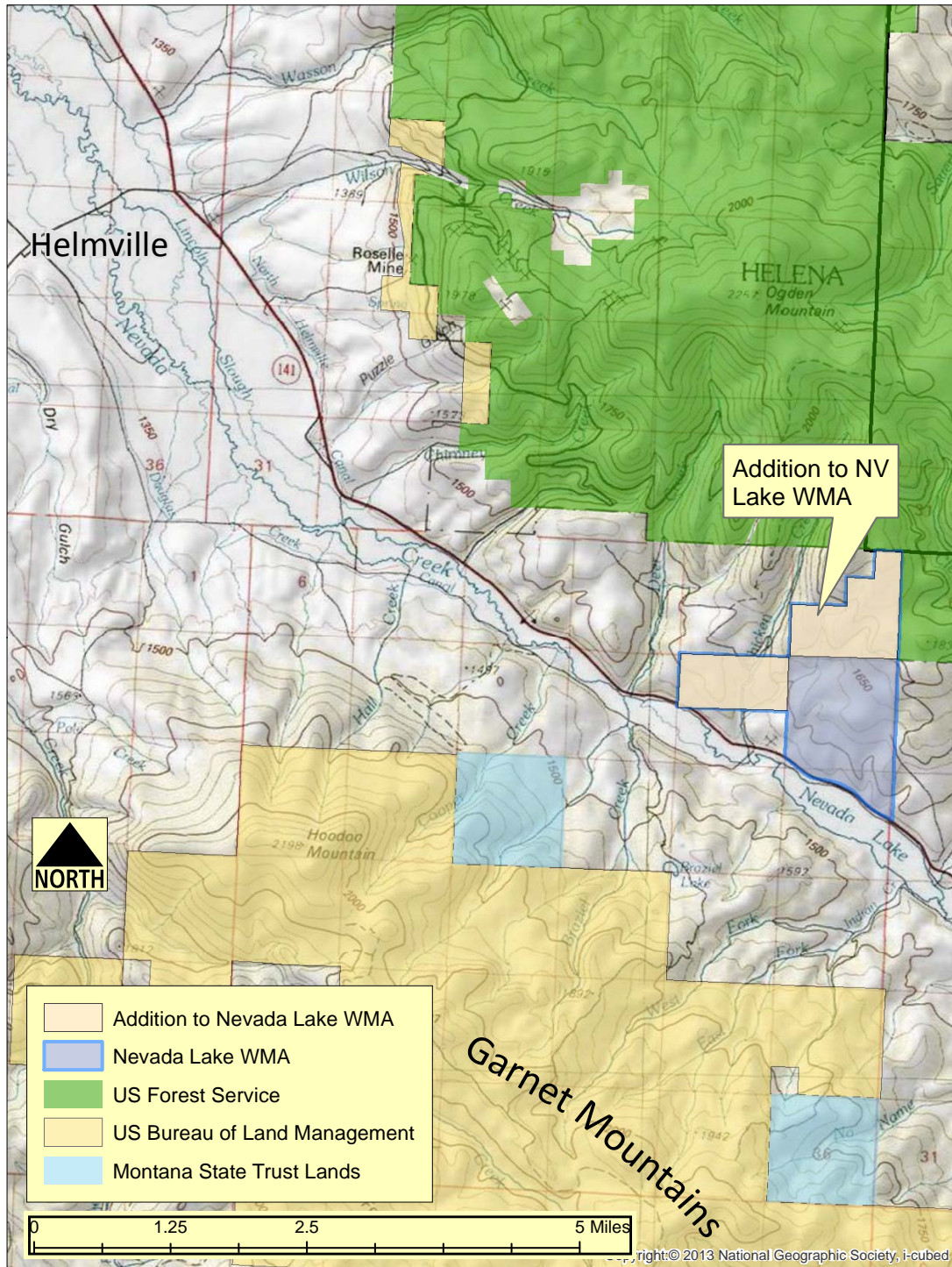
## Nevada Lake Wildlife Management Area Addition

**Purpose:** The Nevada Lake WMA provides critical winter habitat for elk and deer and is frequented by grizzly bears, as well as many other wildlife species. The WMA also serves as a linkage for Canada Lynx and other wildlife between the Helena National Forest and the Garnet Mountains. This 760-acre addition to the WMA establishes a legally accessible connection between the WMA and National Forest, substantially enhancing public recreation and hunting opportunities. Acquiring these parcels helped protect the ecological integrity of the WMA by eliminating the possibility of residential development or other type of habitat conversion above the WMA, which would have directly diminished the WMA's habitat values. The addition also includes about a half mile of Chicken creek, an important tributary for westslope cutthroat trout.

**Habitats:** Bunchgrass Grassland, Conifer Forest, Riparian, Stream



**Figure 23.** The addition to Nevada Lake WMA (newly acquired lands are in the foreground and next nearest ridge). Inset of wintering bulls on the WMA. (Photo credits: J. Kolbe)



**Figure 24. Overview of the Nevada Lake WMA and the 760-acre addition (two parcels), Powell County.**



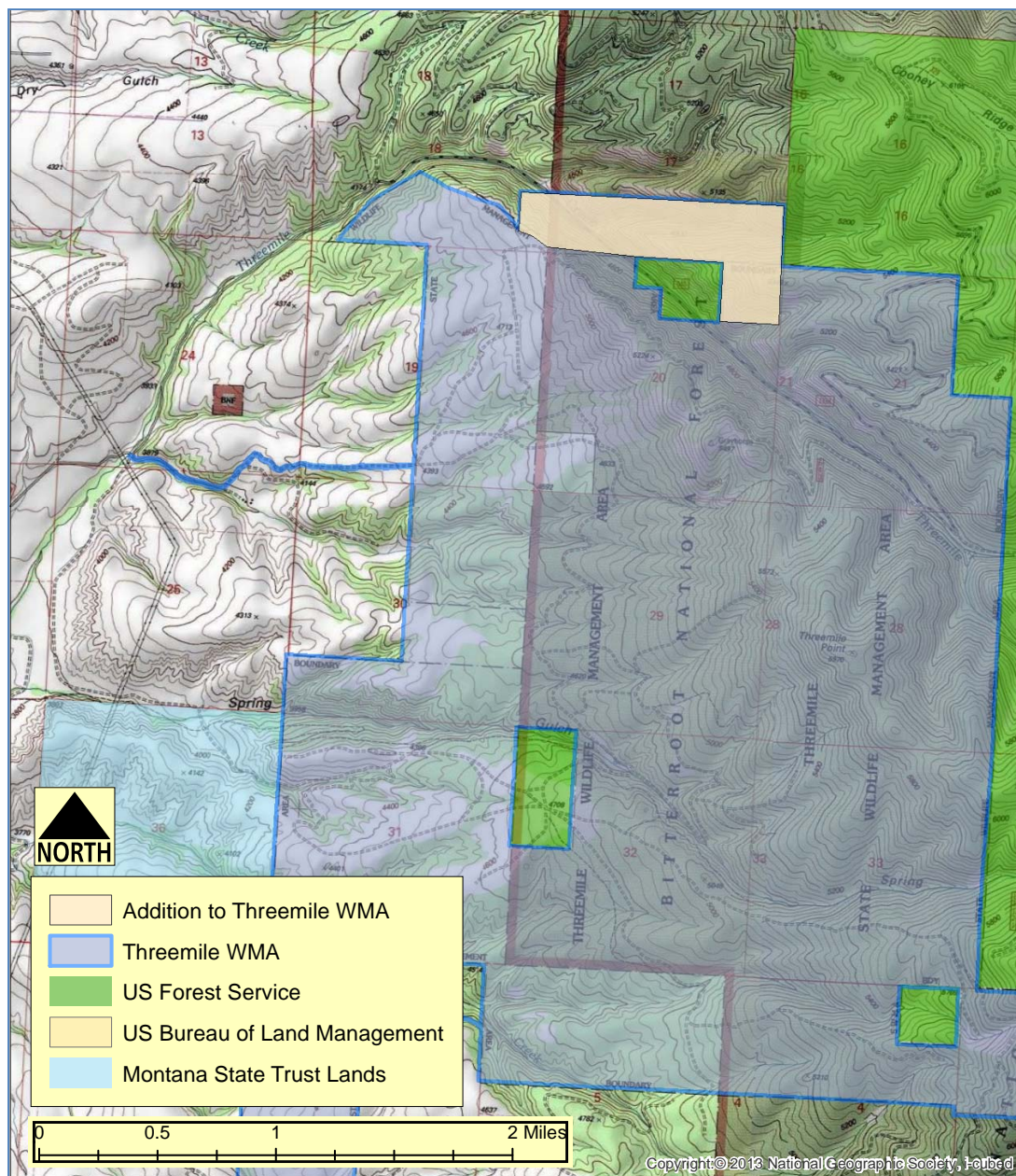
### **Threemile Wildlife Management Area Addition**

**Purpose:** The Threemile WMA, located along the west foothills of the Sapphire Mountains was originally purchased to provide winter habitat for deer and elk that typically spend their summers at higher elevations. Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks was the recipient of a donation of land totaling 215 acres at the north end of the WMA, which is a contiguous part of the winter range. The acreage was bequeathed to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in the last will and testament of Ms. Priscilla Antrim. This generous contribution shares 1.5 miles of common boundary with the WMA and provides additional public access for hunting and other compatible forms of recreation.

**Habitat:** Bunchgrass Grassland, Conifer Forest, Riparian, Stream



**Figure 25. Elk and deer winter range donated by the Ms. Pricilla Antrim estate, Ravalli County. (Photo Credit: J. Parke)**



**Figure 26. Overview of the 215-acre addition to Threemile WMA, 11 miles northeast of Stevensville.**



## **DNRC Inholdings on Beartooth, Blackleaf, and Sun River Wildlife Management Areas**

**Purpose:** FWP purchased the DNRC Trust Lands inholdings that were leased by FWP on three WMAs in FWP Region 4 (Great Falls office). The Beartooth, Blackleaf, and Sun River WMAs all provide high value native mountain foothill habitat that is important for wintering deer and elk, grizzly bears, and a host of other native wildlife. These WMAs are also destinations for hunters, hikers, wildlife watchers, and other recreators. The public expectations and core mission of DNRC is different from that of FWP, which has been cause for management conflicts between the two agencies on these WMAs. After unsuccessfully attempting an exchange of lands between FWP and DNRC for the purposes of consolidating ownerships, which the public was generally not in favor of, the outright purchase of these lands through the DNRC land banking program became the most viable long term solution. FWP purchased a total of 9,488 acres from DNRC. Completion of these purchases will assure consistent management across each of these wildlife properties into the future. The public benefits include a secure future for high priority wildlife habitat, and enhanced income for the Trust Lands program as DNRC uses funds from this acquisition to invest in properties that will generate a higher income while also providing new public recreation opportunities.

**Habitats:** Bunchgrass Grasslands, Riparian, Stream, Coniferous Forest, Aspen Woodlands



**Figure 27. Wintering elk on the Sun River WMA. (Photo Credit: B. Lonner)**



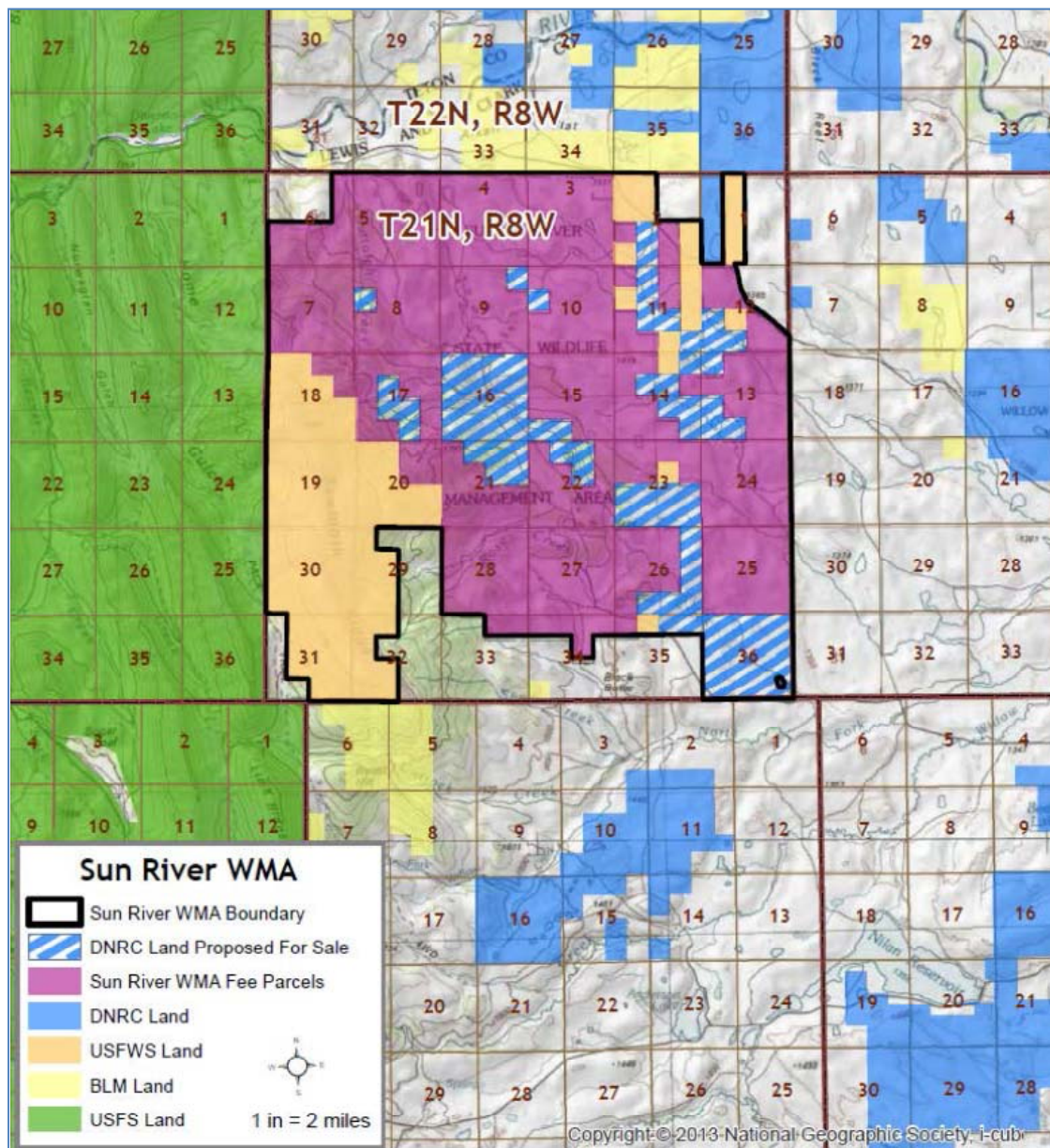


**Figure 28. Beartooth WMA elk winter range. (Photo Credit: C. Loecker)**

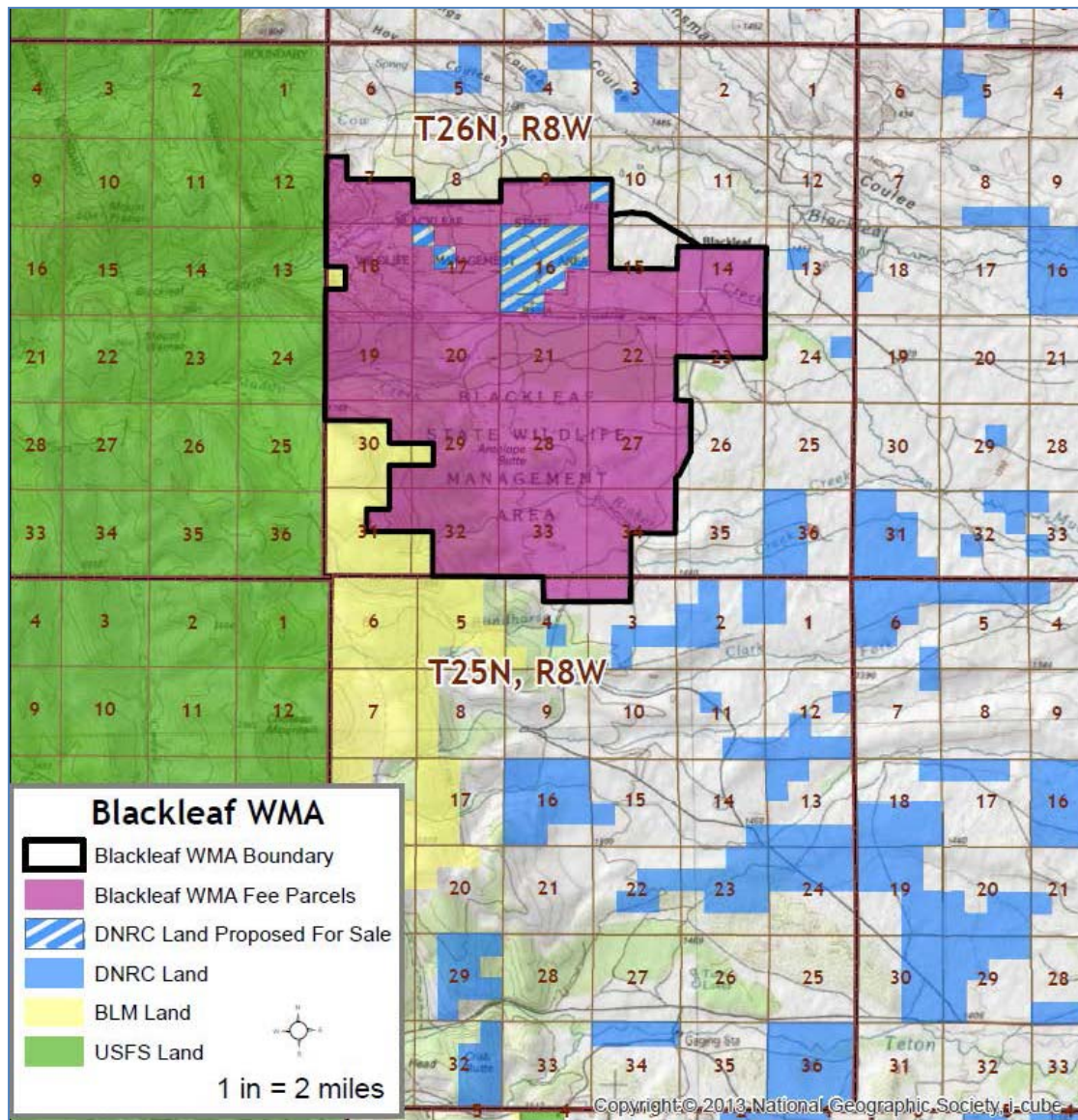


**Figure 29. Rough fescue bunchgrass grasslands, a dominant feature of the Blackleaf WMA. (Photo Credit: R. Northrup)**



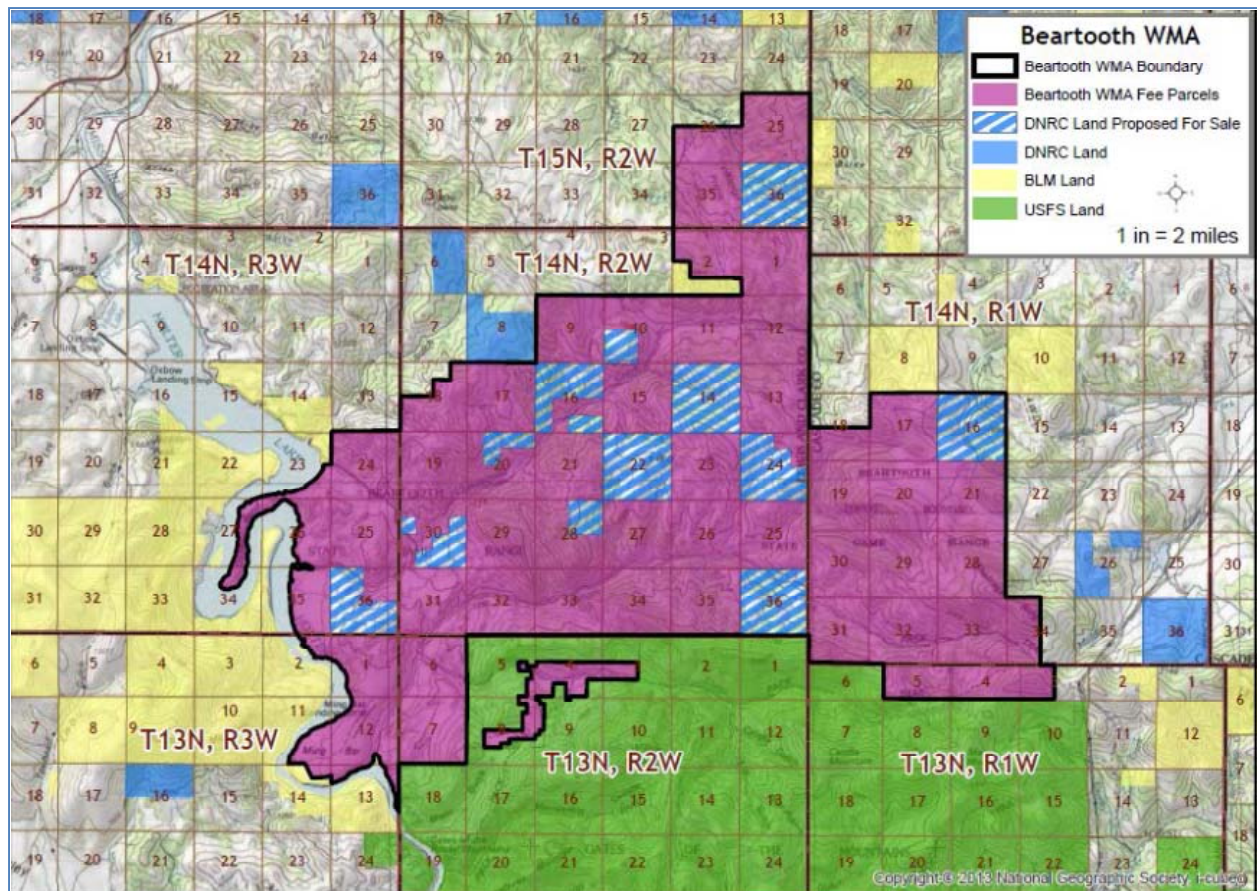


**Figure 30. Overview of DNRC inholdings on the Sun River WMA that were purchased by FWP (as displayed in the public scoping notice), Lewis and Clark County.**



**Figure 31. Overview of DNRC inholdings on the Blackleaf WMA that were purchased by FWP (as displayed in the public scoping notice), Teton County.**





**Figure 32. Overview of DNRC inholdings on the Beartooth WMA that were purchased by FWP (as displayed in the public scoping notice), Lewis and Clark and Cascade Counties.**

## Canyon Creek Wildlife Management Area Addition

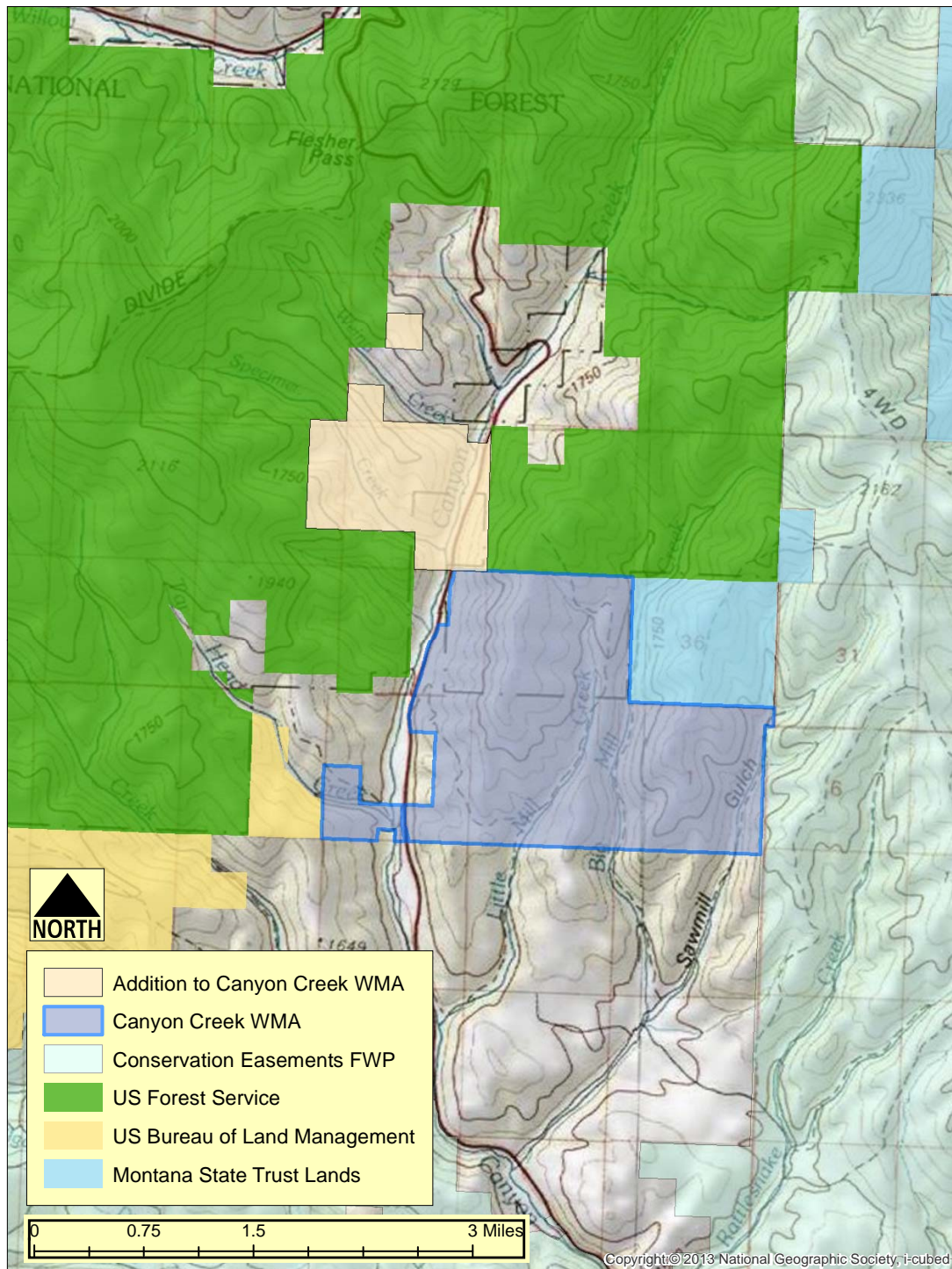
**Purpose:** Canyon Creek WMA provides diverse yearlong habitat for elk, upland game birds, small mammals, and seasonal habitat for deer, grizzly and black bears, forest carnivores, raptors, and many species of breeding neotropical birds. The WMA, which connects with Helena National Forest serves as a popular destination for hunters and other recreationists. The WMA is situated in the vicinity of three conservation easements also administered by FWP. The 729-acre Specimen Creek addition was purchased through a partnership effort by the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and donated to Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks to be managed as part of the WMA. This new parcel supports habitats similar to the rest of the WMA and also provides additional public access to National Forest land.

**Habitats:** Coniferous Forest, Bunchgrass Grasslands, Riparian, Stream



**Figure 33. Specimen Creek addition to Canyon Creek WMA. (Photo Credit: J. Parke)**





**Figure 34. The 729-acre Specimen Creek Addition to Canyon Creek WMA located approximately 30 miles northwest of Helena, Lewis and Clark County.**